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LETTER FROM MR. CARL LUMHOLTZ, IN
NORTHERN MEXICO.

The following letter was received June 13 :

MORELOS, May 21, 1893.

I hope you received a letter sent in January from Guadalupe y Calvo.*

Since then I have been nearly the whole time among the Tepehuanes, a very intelligent but extremely reserved tribe of Indians. I have made a regular harvest of ethnological material from them, and have succeeded in gaining entrance to their secret rites, an allowance which they absolutely refuse (to) Mexicans. They used to be very warlike, probably more so than any other tribe of Mexico. The missionaries found it a hard task to convert them.

At present the greater part of them, who are living in Durango, are getting to be Mexicanized, but of the probably 1500 individuals who live inside of Chihuahua, I was pleasantly surprised to find many in a very primitive state of culture, living in remote *arroyos* (stream-beds) without knowledge of Spanish. They still have an interesting ceremony of making their god and the personified four elements appear at nightly *séances*, for the purpose of which they erect special log houses, that can be made entirely dark inside, having no windows, and but one small entrance.

In "la Semana Santa" (Holy Week) I was fortunate enough to see the big annual foot-race of the Tepehuanes at Baborigame.

* Printed in BULLETIN for March, 1893, pp. 64-65.

Two hundred and twenty-four took part in it, and the race was especially instructive, because the racers were divided into different groups; men, women, married, unmarried, adults, children. However, the sport is not now quite up to the mark of former days, for several reasons, coherent with their "Mexicanized" evolution. The best group of runners was that of the married men, the best of whom, in 3 hours, $1\frac{1}{2}$ minutes, made 13 *vueltas* (circuits). I measured a "vuelta" and found it to be 9223 feet ($9223 \times 13 = 119,899$ feet = 22 miles, 3739 feet).

There was no sign of fatigue shown by the two men who came in first; and as an interesting comparison, I may add that some young Mexicans, who also got up a race at the same time, made, the best of them, one "vuelta" in twelve minutes, while all arrived breathless and apparently not having been able to continue much more. But the Tarahumares are far better runners than the Tepehuanes, and have brought the fast racing into a wonderful state of perfection. I merely mention the above facts to show what endurance an Indian can evince, even in the half-starved condition in which the greater part find themselves at present. I was credibly informed by two independent parties, that only 8 years ago in Baborigame, the best man of the "married group" made no less than 27 "vueltas," on this same race course (249,021 feet = 47 miles, 861 feet). This runner is recently dead, and was well-known over the Sierra. His antagonist made 26 (vueltas), but fell down exhausted, while the former danced lively next day. The race lasted from midday to about 8 p.m.

I have now gone over the western part of the Sierra

from west of Nabogame to here. It is two or three thousand feet lower than the high Sierra, and surrounded with innumerable *barrancas* (ravines) and *arroyos* which make the landscape, seen from a high point, look like stiffened waves. Although as hot down in the *barrancas* and *arroyos* as in *tierra caliente* (hot land), the real *tierra caliente*, or *la costa* (coast) is not reached in less than four days' travel. Where the *arroyos* lie as high as 5000 feet above the sea-level, as in the one where the little mining-place San José is situated, the climate is remarkably even and probably of the healthiest in the world. Lower down the heat is greater than is consistent with comfort. Here in Morelos we have at present, every day, 100° Fahr. in the shade; but the nights are deliciously cool. Even here, at about 1500 feet above sea-level, snow-falls are not unknown, although rare. On the 11th of January, 1884, the manager of the mine tells me, 8 inches of snow fell in Morelos.

At present, as is well known, we are here in Northern Mexico going through an exceedingly dry time. In two years the crops have dried away in many parts of the Sierra. This year, still no rain. A traveller in such a country suffers considerably, and his animals much more. The water dries up in places where it has never been known to be missing. My mules have had to travel twenty-four hours, in a scorching sun, without water. Still, in these hot *barrancas*, I see no difference in the vegetation. The trees and plants don't seem to be affected by rain or no rain. The only exception I have noticed is, that the flat leaf-like joints of the stem of the *Opuntias* are commencing to shrivel up just a

little on the surface ; but the fleshy inside, which is eaten by the Indians, is apparently as juicy as ever.

And what an astonishing adaptation to natural conditions is not the *Cereus Pithaya*, this 20 to 35 feet high cactus, with candelabra-like branches, growing on the very driest and most barren ground, but yielding just now in these days, a most juicy, refreshing fruit in great numbers ! The Indians on the western slopes of the Sierra Madre subsist at present almost entirely on this Pithaya fruit, and the same may at times be said of myself, as I find them wholesome and nourishing.

I am in these days in the old precincts of the Tumbares, who are supposed to be extinct. I find that there are a few left yet, and I have photographed and measured two pure-bred ones here. Only four women and one man are yet able to talk the language at this place. I may hope to meet with some more farther down the river, but there are probably not twenty families left of the whole tribe, and most of them unable to speak the language ; and only just a few pure-bred. They seem to be well made and of a nice, jolly disposition. I am taking down the language, which I think will prove of considerable interest, as there is very little known about this race. They are said to have spoken two entirely different languages ; one a dialect of Nahuatl.

I shall now follow the river San Miguel down to San Ignacio, and from there, over Batopilas, retire again to the high Sierra, this time investigating the grand complex of cave dwellings of the *gentiles* (pagans) around Santa Ana. . . .

With kindest regards,

CARL LUMHOLTZ.